Four Quarters

Volume 18
Number 4 *Four Quarters: May 1969 Vol. XVIII, No. 4*

Article 1

5-1969

Four Quarters: May 1969 Vol. XVIII, No. 4

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/fourquarters

Recommended Citation
(1969) "Four Quarters: May 1969 Vol. XVIII, No. 4," *Four Quarters*: Vol. 18 : No. 4 , Article 1.
Available at: http://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/fourquarters/vol18/iss4/1

This Complete Issue is brought to you for free and open access by the University Publications at La Salle University Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Four Quarters by an authorized editor of La Salle University Digital Commons. For more information, please contact careyc@lasalle.edu.

May, 1969
vol. XVIII, no. 4 • fifty cents
Copyright 1969, by La Salle College

four Quarters

published quarterly by the faculty of la salle college

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2010 with funding from
Lyrasis Members and Sloan Foundation

http://www.archive.org/details/fourquarters91unse

Why Not Say You Loved Her?

• Robert Joe Stout

Gad appeared in the doorway. For a moment, blinking, Frank Lipchak stared, remembering the hospital's pillared entranceway and the evergreened lawn. But coming up the stairs (or elevator?), walking down the hollow medicinal corridors, he'd lost track of . . .

"Come in," Gad repeated.

Muscles moved; Frank sensed the room enclosing him in tightness and smells. There was a window, a bed; blankets and sheets were tumbled in mummied disarray; there was a nightstand, a vase of flowers. He frowned, moving his heavy glasses against the bridge of his nose. A sorcerer's knife had whisked across his stomach, and he was floating, dismembered from that awful tightness that buckled his lungs and bowels. From adjacent clouds, Gad was speaking, and Frank somersaulted with dreamlike slowness, finally finding the older man's patient face floating, like his, among the room's dulled colors.

The face—Gad's face; suddenly it became important. Frank pushed at his glasses again, bringing his stepfather forward. Gad always had looked older than he was, yet features that might have hardened into a tough mask had mellowed somehow, the lines cracking like old leather to let the sentimental through. Now the mouth pushed itself into a concealing smile; the eyes, half-hidden by thick dark lids that drooped like furled sails, were gray and questionless. "I'll be going . . ." his voice said, "you'll want to . . ."

"No," Frank sighed. His head settled slowly onto his shoulders again, shoulders onto bowels and lungs; he glanced at the bed but the figure there was slack, unmoving, and he turned back to Gad. "Stay," he said hoarsely, reaching for the older man's hand.

Gad took it but looked away. "I . . . the doctor was here . . ." he mumbled. Then, breaking their handshake. "A strange thing. 'Those who've been happy,' he said, 'are ready for d-death.' " He shrugged. "Your mother, your mother and I . . ."

"I know."

"No," Gad stopped him bluntly. "No." He squinted, staring at something lodged in the years he had lost. "You . . . you didn't intrude. You could have . . . messed us up. At the beginning."

"I was a boy."

"You didn't intrude," Gad persisted. His face tipped into the hand waiting to hold it and his shoulders vibrated once. "We had twenty years," he continued, his voice thin, his tone quite matter-of-fact. He had outrun the emotion or dodged it and was handling the reins carefully. "It's not, it doesn't matter, I don't have to be . . . in the room when she . . ."

"Gad?"

". . . dies . . ." he whispered, riding the backswells as he searched the walls. "It doesn't matter," he repeat-

ed. Frank watched him crawl ashore, eyes finding the bed and staring at the silent, shrouded figure there. "This isn't real; that was. N-nothing can happen now that, that would change . . . that would . . ." He smiled, spreading his fingers. "Be alone with her, Frank. You, you deserve . . ."

Frayed ends, Frank thought, watching him sluff through the door, an old man with heavy thighs and shoulders that had hefted great weights. The door swung closed and the room began to contract. Space they had moved through disappeared: there was just him and the bed and the figure on the bed, and once she had been . . .

He shook his head. Again his muscles had transported him through space without his mind's awareness. "Mother . . ." he whispered, but the word was hollow; it bore no connection to the concave cheeks, the swollen lids that covered her once bright eyes.

She was old. In death, he'd read, the flesh becomes transparent and the eyes burn like dim fires in deep caves. Not Sammy's. Her flesh had bloated, then begun to slide; its slackness pulled her mouth against her chin. As though it had all been plaster and finally the rain were washing it away.

He shivered. For some reason, sitting so close to her, he could not remember her. The edge of her lip twitched as she breathed—like someone hiccuping in their sleep. *I don't have to be in the room when she dies* . . . She was only conscious for a few minutes now and then, Gad had explained over the phone that morning. When she was conscious, there was little anyone could say to her. She would nod, mumble a few words, close her eyes, and thrash slowly back and forth. Or she would cry and mutter their names or mutter the names of people who weren't in the room. They had no way to tell how much she understood or saw or knew. No way of guessing if she'd ever . . .

Gently, caught in the residue, he touched her lips, then let his fingertips slide along her cheeks up to her hairline, across her forehead, down around her eyes. Still he could not take into his feelings that this was her, his mother, that soon she would be dead. This face nevermore would be . . .

No, her face had vanished months before, leaving only shadows. As her childhood had vanished. As his childhood . . .

He shook his head. Eventually the moment would come when she would no longer exist. Then only absence, vacancy, . . . but already he felt that. No wonder the simple believe in heaven, he thought, it saves them from facing the thing no longer there . . .

He lifted his hand, wishing she would talk. Not to satisfy some longing for a storybook departure—mother and son in their final tearful scene —but because in this stillness he could not feel what he wanted to feel. He turned, sliding away from her, hands dropping into his lap. The room was plain—almost barren—without pictures or shelves; a jagged crack split the plaster high along one wall.

A rap against the door startled him but immediately, before finding out who it was, he stepped back, glad for any intrusion. *Gad must have guessed* . . . he was thinking when the doctor, a stooped young man with a bright, mobile face, came into the room. A nurse and lab assistant followed. They talked briefly—Frank

had met him several times before; behind them, patiently afraid, Gad returned from some excursion—apparently outdoors, for his cheeks were red as though from exercise.

"It might be better if you'd . . ."

Involuntarily, Frank glanced at the bed. The quiet, bloated face, the wasted figure hunched beneath sheets, still floated, cloudlike, there. He nodded, pulling away, expecting something to snap, but nothing happened—there was nothing emotional to break. Her dough-soft face could send no thankyous, bid him no goodbyes.

Gad did not ask how she was. He frowned and took a cigarette from the pack in his shirt pocket. He didn't offer one and Frank smiled. In the knowledge that Frank did not smoke, there was a turn that politeness takes in separating friends from strangers.

"It's a long wait," Gad said toward the corridor wall.

Frank nodded. The smoke did not dissemble but stayed around Gad's face, gray and heavy like wads of dirty cotton. "It's been hard on you," he answered, watching his stepfather's eyes.

"Hard," Gad repeated stolidly, as though pronouncing a name he wanted to remember. "There's so much . . . no," he contradicted, shaking the thought away; "it was hard —hard before I met her. Hard when you . . ."

". . . ran away?"

Gad shrugged. "No," he said again, "those were good times. We—could wipe it all out, her and I. Nothing ever hurt us so bad that we couldn't, just by being, being close, by . . ."

"By making love?"

Gad laughed hoarsely but avoided Frank's glance. "We didn't know—love, it was . . . hell," he shrugged again, flexing his shoulders, "she, she said it sometimes—'making love,' 'I love you, Gad,' but I . . ." He stared at the wall again and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "It seems so long ago, so dark. Whatever it was, it grew. 'Our tree,' she called it. Pine sometimes, oak, 'ho-hol—. . . .' " Abruptly, bending forward, he coughed into one hand, " 'Holly,' " he repeated, " 'stickery and beautiful, bright even in the coldest times'—she liked that best, I think. She . . ."

He'd gone beyond himself and couldn't get back. For a minute, in silence, they stared at the smoke. Then Frank touched the old man's shoulder. Somehow, out of the web of emotions, of living and entangling himself with others, he'd come to a beauty he didn't understand, a joy he didn't want to lose. *Does it seem long ago?* Frank wanted to ask, shivering as the face returned, became a face he knew: his own wife, Cher, young and pretty, ebullient. "It's just that, that each of us, that—life seems so long," he blurted, "until, coming here, I saw her, then saw Cher. One of us will have to wait the other out, like you and . . ."

"I thought I'd be the first," Gad grunted, cuffing the smoke with one fist. He snorted. "You'd think . . ."

Again he lost what he was going to say. Down the corridor they heard footsteps—not the sluffed slippery hurry of nurses but hard and heavy, obviously masculine. A square heavy man in a bluetipped suit turned toward them, squinting at doornumbers. Looking up, he hesitated, then lifted his hand, and came forward to greet them.

Frank had not seen his father for a couple of months, although they

had talked over the telephone. Mike Lipchak had been on the Coast—an island shanty he'd bought for vacationing on Puget Sound—and come back to "watch" his liquor stores just a week or two before. He and Gad shook hands with diffident sympathy, like two old tomcats meeting at a vet's.

"How is she?"

Gad pushed at the matted smoke. "Almost gone," he grunted without wincing. "She may not come to again."

Frank watched Mike's features rebuff the words. But they got through, biting somewhere inside, and he quivered, touching the small of his back as though in pain. As a young man he had been strong and florid, with quick emotions and an easy smile; but now, at fifty-eight, his hair and brows had grayed and his lips and eyes lost color, even after long excursions to his island woods.

"She seemed so young," he murmured, looking at the floor. "I only came to . . ."

"The doctor's with her," Gad told him. "Some kind of equipment—I don't know what they do."

Nodding, Mike glanced at the door, as though trying to imagine the scene inside. He and Gad got along affably, although they met quite seldom. But both were used to other men and the kind of privacy self-made men retain.

"How's Cher? the kids? I brought some things from the island I meant to drop by. But I don't get over your way these days—not like I used to."

He broke away before Frank could answer and said to Gad. "Would you like to get away for a minute? Have some coffee, I mean? If she . . . I mean, since we can't . . ?"

"Coffee wouldn't do me much good, I'm afraid."

"Come to the Tavern then, both of you."

"Like to," Gad coughed, keeping sentimentality distant. "Frank?"

"Okay."

Mike drove. Pinyan's once had belonged to Mike but he'd sold it a couple of years before. "Liquor stores are easier," he'd confided to Frank, "not so much loss, get a better kind of people to manage them." Still, Pinyan's was his favorite: he'd remodeled it following Frank's advice, keeping the bar dark and quiet ("the Womb Room," they kidded) and the dancing space separate, with muted psychedelic lighting.

The liquor tasted good and they drank with the ease of men who like the comfort of whiskey taken slowly. Gad sat tranquilly, hand on his glass, watching the signs over the bar. Frank closed his eyes, remembering the first bar Mike had owned.

"I had no business going there," Mike grumbled. "I mean, it was so long ago, and I wasn't, wasn't really . . ." He paused, eyeing Gad. Almost trying to goad him into response, Frank thought. "I've never told you this!" he exclaimed, muddling the words as he tried to pronounce them too fast. "I never told you," he repeated, lifting his drink, "but, but I, hell, I treated her bad! Poor . . . girl. Really! Those, those years be-before she married you, they were . . . well, Frank knows. I never told her, either. And now . . ."

"It doesn't matter," Gad said.

"Yes, yes it does. It wouldn't if it had been her, if she'd done something to, well, get herself . . ." He shook his head violently, pushing against the booth's rounded seat as though about to spring over the table.

". . . but you see, I, I . . ."

"She told me."

"She told you I took another woman, a whore off the streets, just to get rid of her? She told you I watched her, found her jobs, gave fellows tips to give to her when she was working in that restaurant? That when she went back to Butte, I came over here to keep away from her?"

Gad nodded, the slight, distant smile slipping across his mouth.

". . . told you I loved her but couldn't take marriage? That it?"

Frank squirmed. With a couple of drinks and his dander up, Mike could get obnoxious, although Frank hadn't seen him brawl in years. Moving his own drink toward the center of the table, he leaned forward just enough to attract his father's attention. But Mike had no time for him.

"That it?" he demanded of Gad. "I asked, 'is that . . ?' "

Gad nodded.

"She lied."

Frank stiffened, ready to defend his mother—an attitude he'd buried but never lost. Gad, caught glancing away, jerked back.

"She lied," Mike repeated, the hard assertion catching in his throat.

"Never mind," Frank interfered. He knew his mother well enough—her loves, disputes, abilities—if there had been secrets, things he didn't know, he didn't want to learn them now. "It doesn't matter, Dad. She's . . ."

"It does." Mike waved his hand, brushing him aside; it was Gad he wanted to address. "It does because I told her that, and she believed. I, I nev—"

He winced, hand going up to hide his eyes. "Hell!" he muttered, "it's so hard to talk." Then, toughness returning, "sure, I told her—it was easy enough. I was trying to make out; I said what came quickest. After we broke up, I felt guilty, embarrassed. I damned well wished somebody'd take her. I never did love her, I let her believe that because she'd been hurt enough. I've never loved any woman in my life."

He lifted his glass, curling his lip as he swallowed the last of his drink. Like he used to, Frank noticed, watching his profile, pudgier than it had been when Frank had run away to be with him years before. Gad, too, was drinking, but his smile, involved with secrets neither Frank nor Mike could share, remained anonymous.

"I never loved her," Mike repeated. "I never loved you either, Frank. It was all bullshit. I wouldn't have married her if she hadn't been pregnant, and you . . ." He shrugged, turning, rapping his knuckles against the wall behind him to attract the bartender's attention, ". . . You were just a bother," he choked, "it wasn't till you got married, till you came back and . . ."

I should be hurt . . . Frank thought, watching his father's face move. ". . . At least now you know . . . " Mike's voice was saying, but Gad, across the table, laughed.

"And what do you think I was after?"

Mike lowered his head, eyeing Gad as though a bet had been raised.

"She was goodlookin', she was available. She liked me." Again the laughter twined around his expression. If I were a stranger, Frank thought, and had heard one of the two was losing his wife, I'd guess it were Mike. He shook his head, watching, as Gad looked toward the rows of neatly arranged bottles in front of the bar's long low mirror. "What is love anyway?"

"I've never loved . . ."

Gad shrugged. "Never been made happy by it, maybe." The words were just loud enough to carry across the table. "I had no idea, when we first started that it would be twenty years. That it would change, get better, that it would make me so happy that . . ."

He glanced down, moving the ice-cubes in his glass. "That, when it came time, time to de-depart, that still I'd be ha-happy . . ."

Laughter and tears. Gad shook his head, chin thrust back, while he tried to swallow. Looking down, Frank saw his own glass, almost empty, and idly touched the rim, tracing his fingertips once around its cool slick surface. *I touched Mother's face but she wasn't . . .*

"Why not say you loved her?" Gad asked. Though thin, his voice was surprisingly unemotional; he seemed very much in control. "And she loved you—why not say it? What else was it? You, if you and she . . . I don't know, but it happened the way it did. There's no such thing as love maybe. We just, we all get tossed out into the world, and we run till something happens—hate or murder or suicide or, I don't know, but suddenly it's there, that's all. Sammy and I were happy. We changed. Maybe we were ready to, I don't know. Maybe we were too dumb to do anything else. But it wasn't, it wasn't . . ." He lifted his hand, the laughter lapping against his attempts to speak. ". . . it was just the same," he blurted, finally, "just what came quickest. And we kept on. Is that . . ."

Love? he'd meant to continue. The laughter curled around his mouth and died. He straightened, staring at the wall behind the bar, where new grooved lumber butted into ancient raftering. For a moment, turning, Frank saw her too: a thin dazzling woman with yellow hair and hippy girlish gait coming out of the shadows towards them. "*Frank!*" she was calling, "*Mike! Gad!*" Then she was gone—he thought she was gone—but his father jumped suddenly, hands pressing the tabletop, arms quivering as he stared. "M'god! m'god!" he whispered, "m'god it's, it's . . ."

Gad was crying. The tears slid down his cheeks into the creases beside his nose; as he breathed, he opened his mouth and his tongue caught them. "*Frank! Mike! Gad!*" the voice seemed to echo but only the bartender came, towel over his shoulder, blunt fingers digging at something beneath his shirtfront and collarbone. "Three more?" he asked, "Same all around?"

"Three more," Gad whispered, shielding his face to keep the tears from being seen. His glance met Frank's and Frank looked down, unable to bear the light exploding through the haunted eyes. His mother was there—thin, exuberant, beautiful—and Cher, the wife he was just learning to . . .

He threw the word aside. "Maybe it wasn't love," he whispered, swinging around to find his father's eyes. But Mike, arm covering his face, refused the chance. "I lied," he muttered helplessly. But unlike Gad he couldn't seem to cry.

Thanatopsis

• Patricia S. Staten

I was twelve when I walked with my two older sisters down the short aisle where they held the wake to kneel on the padded bench before the coffin of my cousin. Behind me I could hear the weeping and the sighs of all those figures dressed in black. I felt as though I were going on stage, as though this were a school play and all the relatives and adults would judge me now. My sister held my sweating hand. I knew I would forget how to make the sign of the cross. I couldn't think of one prayer as I approached the coffin.

I kneeled at the end of the bench before the shiny coffin. The upper half of the coffin was open just above Will's (my cousin) waist. I was kneeling at his feet. I stared at the top directly under my eyes. I could not bring myself to turn my head for my eyes to move to that faint white blur in my side vision. I had seen a dead man before—when I was five and grandpa died and he looked like he was asleep in the coffin and grandma had lifted the top and kissed him and put her rosary in his hands. But I was only five, and then death was only the sleep that came to old people.

I remembered Will as distant sketches through my mind—faint, unreal, quickly fading. Sometimes I did not know what had really happened and what I had imagined happened from what adults told me. He was my oldest cousin, ten years older than myself, and although relatives later laughed and said Will was always a tease, I do not remember him in that context. I remembered a red-haired freckled boy who played with my brother and who hated girls as much as most boys do at that age. The only distinct incident in my mind was when Will tore apart his mother's washing machine to make a motor cart out of his wagon, and my uncle hit him. Other than that, I could not remember Will connected with my childhood.

As I looked at the top of the coffin, reflecting in iridescent flickers the flame of the surrounding candles, and watched the black curtains behind the coffin hanging heavy and somber with death and grief—then I could only recall Will as I saw him six months before. I had gone with my mother to my Aunt Mary's farm outside town. I sat across the room from my aunt and mother in the still afternoon. My mother talked in whispers to my aunt, who spoke in an undertone and kept lighting cigarette after cigarette. I watched the summer sunlight through the open door falling like a spotlight, the dust filtering through the rays—dark specks floating through the streak of light with the slow-motion movement of water.

Will walked in from outside and stood against the rays—only a tall, dark,silhouetted figure. When he stepped out of the light, I could see he still wore his Navy uniform. He was tall, robust, and apparently

healthy. I wondered why my mother and my aunt had been speaking in whispers about Will being ill.

My aunt looked at Will nervously, "You've still got your uniform on."

"It's all I've got, Mom." (Will had just been discharged from the Navy because of his illness.)

"I could buy you some other clothes if you want, Will," my aunt said.

Will looked at her, then shrugged. "What for?"

They were all quiet for a while, then my mother said, "Will, I haven't seen you since you were a boy."

"Hasn't he grown?" my aunt asked with a sort of lachrymose pleasure.

"Oh, yes, definitely. I think you're the biggest man in the family, Will."

Will didn't reply and again they lapsed into silence. I looked out the window, tracing with my eyes the dusty road leading away from the farmhouse to the endless summer-hot plains.

"How do you feel, Will?" my aunt asked.

Will grinned. I thought it was odd that he should be happy about being sick. "Fine. It doesn't hurt. And when it does, there's the drugs." I kept studying Will to see what could possibly be hurting him.

"You're going to New York, I hear," my mother said.

"Yes." He grinned again—that boyish, out of place grin. "The Navy will pay for the treatment and the experts are in New York. I might as well try . . . I haven't got anything to lose . . . and the Navy is paying for it."

My aunt seemed hurt. "Even if the Navy didn't pay, you know we would."

"The Old Man wouldn't put out that kind of money for treatment . . . especially since it's hopeless."

My aunt jumped up, startling me. "It's not hopeless!"

"There's no known cure for cancer," he mumbled.

"They're finding cures everyday. Everyday! Who knows when—"

Will was irritated, angry, "Oh, Mom, stop it! The doctors gave me six months. That's all." He suddenly seemed tired. "I don't even know why I'm bothering with the doctors in New York."

"Other people have been cured of cancer. They have!" My aunt turned, pleading, to my mother, "Haven't they?"

My mother did not seem to know what to say, then she hesitantly replied, "Yes, a lot of people have been cured. You read about it all the time."

"Yes! We can't give up hope!"

Will shrugged. "The doctors in New York are only a long-shot. I decided to take it. It's certainly better than dying here on the farm—which is where the Old Man would have me die."

My aunt was ready to cry. "That's not so, Will. Your father would do anything—"

Will laughed brutally, "Yes, my father would do anything! We all know that. He took me out of school when I was fifteen to break my back out here throwing hay so he wouldn't have to hire a hand. I didn't even finish high school because of him. The only time in my life I got away from his beatings was when I joined the Navy." Will laughed again. "I'll bet he thinks there's some sort of justice in that—that I got cancer in the Navy and now I'm dying."

"Don't talk like that, Will. You

don't know how this is hurting him," my aunt said.

"Ha! I can imagine how this is hurting him—the old sadist! If he hadn't been so free with his beatings, this never would have happened—"

My aunt looked away guiltily, then mumbled, "It never would have happened if you hadn't got in the fight in that bar a year ago. That broke open the old wound."

"And who caused the old wound? I'm dying! I won't protect him now or say the things you want to hear. Sure I got in a fight and I got hit in the head with a chair—the same place he hit me when I was a kid and it never healed right." He suddenly turned to his mother, "Why didn't you get a doctor then when you knew it wasn't healing right?"

"I didn't know. I just thought it was a cyst. Everyone gets them. They're harmless," my aunt replied.

"Yes, mine is very harmless. It is only going to kill me." He laughed. "What an irony! To be slowly murdered ten years later for a childish prank like tearing a washing machine apart. That's why he hit me in the head. And now look at it!" He suddenly turned showing us the back of his head.

It was only a small patch of bare skin in the middle of his red hair at the back of his head—a tiny patch like that of a monk. The skin was white, naked with the hair all around, and when he turned I noticed the indentation the patch made in the back of his head. He seemed proud of it showing it to us like that—the way some people show their appendicitis scar. I kept looking at the bald spot trying to understand how such a minor thing could destroy some one.

"You're going bald," I said. Will looked at me and laughed.

He kneeled down in front of me and I drew back frightened. He took my hands in his own and, smiling, said, "Hello, freckle-face, I didn't see you. Do you remember me?"

"No."

He suddenly stood up, turned, and walked out of the room.

Kneeling in front of his coffin, now I thought he was not the big man that I thought he was then, that lying in the coffin he seemed even small. My eyes slowly wandered to where his hands lay crossed on his waist—those two still, cold, beautiful hands as immovable, as quiet as a frieze. He did not have the big, rough, calloused hands of a farmer or a sailor. His hands were terrifyingly beautiful in death.

That night, six months before, we had returned from my aunt's farm. It was late when my mother got the telephone call from my aunt. I awoke and listened to the hushed, desperate voice of my mother on the phone: "What? They won't admit him? That's ridiculous! . . . You said he had all those papers from the Navy to get him into any hospital when it started to hurt him. What does it matter if he has a family doctor? . . . All right, all right, try to calm down, Mary. If he's in pain, surely they'll let him in . . . Aren't the drugs helping at all? . . . I don't know what we can do . . . Yes, I know. I suppose Jim could reach the senator . . . I don't know. Yes, I'll try. I'll try. Give me your number and I'll call back."

My mother hung up and frantically called my brother long distance. My brother was an Air Force Academy cadet. He had been appointed by the state senator, and my mother was playing on the distant hope he could reach the senator and get Will admitted to the hospital that night. Tele-

phone calls continued all night, and near dawn the senator did reach the hospital and Will was admitted but not before he had passed out in the hall.

Weeks later Will recovered enough to leave the hospital. We had gone over to my aunt's to say goodbye to him. He was driving to New York for special treatment. Will was much thinner, and the back of his head was in a bandage. The relatives talked of weather and the crops.

My uncle stood by the car as Will put his few suitcases in. My uncle was a huge man with a beer stomach, bald head, and always wore blue work overalls. "I don't see why you can't fly, Will," he said.

"I want to see the country going back."

My uncle did not reply for a while, then he said, "What if you have another attack?"

"Then you're out a car," Will said.

"Hell, I'm not worried about the car. You could kill yourself driving across country in your condition." Will only laughed, and again there was the silence. My uncle's voice seemed harder, "When will I get the car back?"

"They can ship it back with my body," Will said.

Will drove to New York and he did have an accident, but it wasn't because he had an attack. On a freeway outside New York City, Will drove the car into a cement overpass. He wasn't killed or even badly injured.

He entered the New York hospital and they began treatment. A few months later my aunt flew to New York to be with him, since there seemed no hope of stopping the cancer that had spread from his head down his spinal column.

Kneeling in front of his coffin, my eyes moved from Will's hands to his face. I did not want to look at his head. I thought the cancer would have eaten away half his skull, but when I did look I knew they must have fixed it before they put him in the coffin. He was still handsome, dressed in a white suit, his face thin, the bones protruding like a carving. Around his mouth were the deep creases my mother later said came from the pain. The veins in his forehead stood out as large as pencils.

My sisters crossed themselves and I followed. We went back to the benches and kneeled by our parents. I looked at this uneasy group in black, this kneeling Greek chorus of Kansas farm people—some crying, some pretending to pray, some touching their rosaries, some simply going through the ritual. No one was surprised that Will lay stretched out before them. Death had been expected. We all knew Will would die and we would be forced to kneel here for hours before the coffin. But still I heard the sobs and sighs.

"He was so young," they said. "It's hard to understand when death comes to the young."

Then someone would say, "The good die young." And all would agree.

I watched the front bench where my aunt and uncle and Will's brother and sister sat. My aunt had aged many years in the last six months. Her hair had turned gray and her head had a slight shaking to one side. Her hands were thin and constantly trembling—her laugh high-pitched, nervous, quick. My uncle seemed the same—still sitting with

his heavy, blunt, somewhat crude presence. Tom, Will's brother, was a sort of typical young man who would never have the size his brother had. Will's sister, Nancy, had become quite the beauty with her long red hair and voluptuous figure although she was still only sixteen.

My aunt and uncle rose and went to kneel before the coffin. They remained there, mute, statue-like, for some time, my aunt's head twitching slightly. Then my uncle slowly rose, a huge man pathetic in his grief. He suddenly began shaking his head and saying over and over, "No . . . no . . . no . . . no . . ." The beer fat around his belly shook with his sobs, and beads of sweat stood out on his bald head. My aunt took his arm firmly and led him away from the coffin.

The next day was the day for the funeral. It was a dreary, gray November day on the plains. The wind swept up dust clouds, whirled leaves under our feet. I fell asleep in the car during the funeral procession to the church. The cars parked in a confused line outside the church. Relatives greeted each other, commented on the day, or stood in silence like actors in a melodrama waiting for the right lines, for the proper cue to begin the tragedy, while they thought of the long day ahead getting Will buried and the long drive home that night.

We knelt in the second row behind my aunt and uncle and two cousins. The coffin was in the middle of the hall of the church, closed now. The Father came out and after the preliminary ritual stood before the pulpit beginning his sermon, "Some say that man evolved from the monkey, that man is only the end product of evolution, that man was not made by the hand of God, that Adam was not molded from clay by the hand of God, and that Eve was not created from the rib of Adam. Some say we are only another species of animal."

I yawned and looked at the coffin. It was so quiet, so unconcerned. There were not as many tears today in the daylight. I strained my neck looking up at the sunshine hitting the colored glass of the church, playing through the stained-glass pictures of Jesus and Mary. Mother glanced at me and I looked down.

I wondered if I could see her then, because I was suddenly curious to see her. I looked around at the kneeling group of relatives and friends, then thought that she must be in the front row because she was his wife. I had not seen her before. None of us had seen her before the funeral. She was from New York. She had come back with my aunt and my mother (my mother had gone to New York to help my aunt in the last few weeks) and the body. I was curious to witness her grief, to see what young tragic love was like.

I saw her then and was surprised I had not noticed her before. She was kneeling beside my aunt. I was to the back and side of her so I couldn't see her that well. She was a small figure, I remember, with smooth hips and full breasts and black hair. They say she was four months pregnant then, although I could not tell it. I watched her face. She was serene. There were no tears, no expression of torment, no dazed looks. She seemed unconcerned. Relatives later said she was doped up for the funeral but she did not look doped to me. She looked removed, as though she were watching television. Her raven hair and tranquil dark eyes were even darker behind the black veil. She could not

have been more strange to us if she had just come in off the streets and sat down in our midst. I never heard her speak during that entire day except in an undertone to my aunt, and the next day she flew back to New York.

That night I heard my mother talking to my father in the bedroom. "She only married Will for the money. Why else would she want to marry him four months before he died?" my mother said.

"Maybe she loved him," Dad replied.

"Yes, we saw how much she loved him today. Not even one tear. She didn't love him. How could she?"

"We don't know anything about it," Dad said.

But Mother continued, "I was there at the end, too. You should have seen Will then—half his head gone and so far out on drugs he didn't know if he was dead or alive. You want to know my opinion, I think it's a disgrace that they ever—That she's carrying a child by him."

"It takes two to make a child," my father interrupted.

"Yes and I know why she did it. Child support from the government, that's why. Why, that girl's just a poor ignorant kid out of the New York slums. She didn't have anything till she married Will. Did you see her today? Not even a tear for her own child's father."

Dad's voice was tired, "Will married her. No one forced him to. He must have wanted to marry her."

"Well, who knows what was going through Will's mind. Do you know what he did? He got up out of the hospital bed one day, walked right out and went and got married and bought a house for her, all in one day . . . and got her pregnant."

"That was his business."

Mother kept talking as though she were personally offended by Will's marriage, as though it were in bad taste. "Now the Navy has to pay for the child and the home. That girl won't have to do anything for the rest of her life."

"That was Will's affair. Maybe he thought he wanted a child when he was dying. He probably got a lot of funny ideas in his head laying in bed waiting to die," Father said.

"Will was as sane as you and I. The pain and dope may have made him crazy sometimes, but he knew what he was doing that day. Do you know what he said? The next day after he married her, he came back to the hospital. Poor Mary was so frantic all night thinking Will had killed himself or something. But the next morning his wife brought him back to the hospital and he introduced her to Mary. No one had ever seen the girl before that morning. And Will said—listen to this—'I'm leaving the insurance money to her. The Old Man doesn't get a penny of it.' That's what he said. That's why he married the girl. And what about poor Mary making herself a nervous wreck over Will and he does somethinig like that . . ."

"Will must have known the girl. You don't just go pick a girl up in the street in one day and marry her. He probably knew her from before when he was stationed in New York. He may have loved the girl."

My mother continued angrily, "Love, ha! Those two didn't love each other. Do you know she didn't come to see him once during all that time except the day she came to tell him she was pregnant and the day he died. Never a word out of that girl."

Dad sounded irritated. "Oh, leave

it alone. That was Will's business. He had a right to get married if he wanted to. Besides, what's done is done."

Kneeling behind her, I watched the small, serene figure of the young girl Will had married. She was probably no older than nineteen.

Finally the service was over. We met again on that lonely, barren hill outside town where all my family is buried. Tumbleweeds were piled up against the fence and the summer grass had yellowed and turned brown. I looked at the cold, solitary tombstones—some half-sunken beneath the dry ground. The black, barren, frightened trees bent with the wind.

The coffin, covered with a flag, stood on a lift by a freshly dug grave, and far away sat a bulldozer. The tent flapped and swayed in the spasmodic wind. The immediate family sat in folding chairs in the front row, and the rest of us knelt behind on the hard earth. The Father said the words they always say, and a young boy in uniform stepped up to play taps at the end of the service. The horn was a faint, lonely sound over the wind and dusty earth. The Father took the flag off and, folding it, handed it to my aunt, who held it in her lap.

Behind us guns were fired in unison—sharp, loud, startling. My aunt jumped up out of the chair, dropping the flag to the ground. My mother stepped forward and took her arm. "It's only the gun salute, Mary." My aunt sat down again and they finished.

Later we gathered again at my aunt's house and according to family custom began to pile our plates with an abundance of food laid out on the dining room table. People ate and began to talk and some laughed. My aunt retired to a bedroom. I watched the solitary figure of Will's young bride sitting on the sofa. No one spoke to her and she did not seem to mind.

The men broke out a barrel of beer and started drinking. Soon they were playing cards and laughing and telling stories. The women sat in groups discussing clothes or this or that neighbor. Will's sister left with her boy friend for a few hours late in the afternoon. Later when she came back, I met her in the bathroom. I had gone to wash my hands, and she was standing radiant in front of the mirror combing her red hair.

"Didn't Will look good?" Nancy said.

"Yes."

"They did a good job on him." She quickly put her comb away and left. Later, near sunset, everyone wandered down to the lake not far from my aunt's house. Will's brother, Tom, was driving the motorboat around the lake with one arm around his girl. The men were all pretty drunk by then, and people sat in groups drinking, eating, talking.

I heard my uncle, very drunk, yell to Tom, "Bring it in now!"

But Tom did not seem to hear and still roared around the lake obviously trying to impress his girl. Finally he did come in. When he stepped out of the boat, my uncle hit him across the face with his fist. Tom fell down and then stood up cursing. But he only dusted off his trousers and walked away.

I noticed Will's wife then—that mysterious, contented figure moving through this pantomime of grief. She was sitting near the water alone. The scene between my uncle and Tom momentarily attracted her attention, and I almost thought she might speak

to us then, but she only stood up to wander off in the other direction in her odd seclusion.

That night my father, as drunk as my uncle, sang songs in the backseat of the car as we drove home and said, "Well, I guess Will must be tickling old grandpa's toes by now."

Funerals are always much the same in our family, and there have been other funerals since Will's. We remember Will with perhaps a little more nostalgia than the rest because he was only twenty-two years old and because he died so painfully. At the last funeral, my uncle's, I noticed Will's small granite tombstone was beginning to sink slowly beneath the yearly accumulation of dust and its own weight.

Annually my Aunt Mary still receives the glossy, colored photographs from New York. Will's wife sends them on, although no one has seen her since the funeral. The pictures are all of Will's little girl taken yearly on her birthday. Mary is always making plans to go to New York to see her granddaughter, but she never does. The pictures are always much the same—a little girl with red hair and freckles (like Will's) eating cake, wearing a birthday hat, blowing out candles while her mother holds her, and her red-haired stepfather stands beside her.

Old Letter

• Joseph Beatty

Dear Mary Evans, wherever you are, it is December nineteen sixty-five,
Fifteen years since we kissed at recess and you cried
From embarrassment and joy. Love was something we tried to decipher
By touch. Your hair and eyes were brown, were they not? Mother
Told me you were Protestant and attended revival meetings,
And that your father drank and drank after he was discovered cheating
At the bank. But I knew you full of earth and sun, simple
And pure-hearted, though awkward. Dear Mary, with only one dimple,
Beautifully lefthanded, when you placed my hand on your heart to feel its beat
I felt no heart at all, and for a while believed you something of a freak
To love without a heart. I write you today, knowing more but loving less,
To tell you that the heart is on the left. You are married, I guess,
And will need to know such things to teach your children. If you know
Already, understand my letter as untimely remembrance from an old beau,
One you first inspired to meditate love and the whereabouts of the heart.

Standing Still in the Air

• Laurel Trivelpiece

Connoisseur of white nights, that's me, and I wouldn't hesitate to mark this one as the all-time best of class. A blinding lack of darkness that echoes and reverberates endlessly, from one shore of my skull to the other. Oh, outwardly it's standard enough. Here's the moon, shining between our Venetian blinds in neat and even bars; I can almost feel them through the blankets over my ribs. I move closer to Roger, that warm and solid mammal. I do not mind the precise little pops of snoring. In fact, it eases me to envy and protect his sleep. There he lies, safe from judgment, excused from involvement, while I project my failures in the usual dark arc across the foot of our bed.

"Actually, it is the fear of failing that holds him back. All in the world that stands in the way of his doing adequate work," Mrs. Douthit says. After school, I confer with her about Walter, who is failing second grade. "With proper counseling, we will get at the root of that fear." The bright points in her dark old eyes widen at the prospect, and she taps her clean, dry fingers on the desk. She is well up on the procedures that should convert our young bedwetter. Thin gray hair picks up wisps of afternoon light around her soft jaws. She would not dream of revealing her contempt for young mothers who cripple their children through lack of sensitivity to their needs. I nod with the proper, thoughtful slowness, still hollow inside with the last night's insomnia, and count the cold edges of shadow showing in the knife pleats of my brief skirt. Walter holds back, he is not a plunger like his mother. But I know very well that I am not a plunger either, at heart. It's just that the day comes when one no longer can be sustained by the usual harmless round, darting from yoga classes to bridge tables to geology seminars. And then one must move on to fresh areas, no matter how tiring or cheerless they may prove to be. It is too soon to nod again. I read "we will plant seeds" chalked white on the green board. Above, hung in careful intervals, are the children's pictures of vegetables they are evidently planning to plant. No gardener will ever encounter such burly red tomatoes, such bristling orange and phallic carrots. One sheet of the pale rough paper is quite empty except for a few tentative dark green lines, cramped down in the left-hand corner. Walter's work. I shift my view to the adjoining wall, where the Good Readers chart hangs. Light shatters in wavering lines on the gold stars following each reader's name, but the names are too far away for me to read. One is followed only by neat and empty bars.

"Perhaps his father and I could meet with the school psychologist," I say obediently, and Mrs. Douthit feels the way is being smoothed as it should be toward the end of this con-

ference. Her lap makes small movements, preparatory to her release from my presence. She finds the outsize orange plastic chains clashing on my arms, the matching mini-skirt flaunting my legs, even my long hollow cheeks, almost overtly disturbing.

I wait to tell Roger until he is settled with his pre-dinner drink. He has not been able to repress a "Sheila, please! Put it out. That's the fourth you've smoked since I came home." In small matters Roger is capable of being masterful, and out of habit and good manners I continue to acquiesce. Now he presses together his long, faded lips. I remember how startlingly red those lips were ten years ago, when he was thirty and I was eighteen and we were married. His eyes sag into the corner wrinkles as he listens. Long ago he settled down in his corporate nest at Guaranty Insurance but not, it seems, to rest. "Just what is the school psychologist supposed to accomplish?" I twitch the onion in my glass and repeat Mrs. Douthit's words. "The school psychologist will evaluate his difficulties. In other words, Roger, if they think he needs a head shrink they'll let us know." He shakes out his newspaper, a crackling screen between me and his face. There is much election news tonight, most of it to the detriment of our local candidate, but he is not reading. His shoes are a steady, solemn dark brown. However, the socks rising out of them are silken black, and purple clocks travel over his pointy ankle bones. Roger has gained twenty pounds since our marriage, but his ankles are still thin. Of course he will go to the meeting with the psychologist, like a diplomat going anywhere, at any time, to discuss peace. He has no choice. I sip my martini, and wonder again when Roger realized that he was hopelessly entangled with a pale, sharp-boned child who picks his nose and wets his bed and has no friends.

It's no affair of mine. My involvement with Walter may be spotty; in fact some days it vanishes altogether, but no hope of reform taints it. We are of a piece, and I wish him no less happiness than I do myself. What is more, I cannot bring myself to feel guilt for his flaws. When I cheat him of my presence, as I do so often now, there are no anguished overtones. It is simply a matter of taking from one who has very little to begin with. Oh, we will manage, Walter and I. To keep up appearances we will go along with the testing, counseling, evaluation that will help comfort Roger. The crackers and cheese I put out tonight are definitely on the stale side. The cheddar especially looks hard and wet at the corners. If we had flies, a black juicy one would land right there, on that dark rigid corner. Every evening I snatch up a group of like tidbits to assemble on the tray with our drinks. Neither of us ever touches them. But if I forget, he will begin again to bring home little jars of pickled things—artichoke hearts, peppers, small green tomatoes. He used to hand them to me with tender words. Most of the time he remembers not to speak to me unnecessarily now.

Others are not so restrained. Today at the luncheon Mary Alice attached herself to my side. She has been hearing things, and hands me the salad with the most shrimp piled on it. We have been best friends since junior high—we have nothing in common now and probably never did, but Mary Alice is always ready to

marvel at me. "It's being buzzed all over. What if Roger hears!" Safe behind her solid blameless face, she is deliciously stirred.

"Roger? Are you being funny?" I say it so lightly. "He'd never dare open his mouth."

"How you can treat him like this, a man like Roger—Sheila, I'll never understand you!" She thinks I'm long overdo for the coming smash which we both know she will nurse me through. Motherly Mary Alice. "Hey, watch out for these rolls. She must have sneaked down to that day-old place again." So it is Betty, our hostess, her curls as lively as a headful of red spiders, who has been attacking me today. Before we sit down to bridge, she must show us their new painting. "Just no resistance when it comes to His Work, either of us." She laughs tenderly. He is a fashionable Korean artist, and Betty and Greg think they know a shrewd investment when they see one. "And where will we hang it! Every wall we have is absolutely wall-to-wall with paintings now! But you know Greg." Her audience does indeed know Greg, and there is an unfortunate pause before we rise to duty, docilely confirming Greg's high devotion to the arts. I hear a flutter or two of whispering behind me, instantly smothered in giggles, that may have been for Greg instead of me. We move back to the bridge tables. My cards are a wild, shifting disaster.

"I thought you bid two hearts, partner."

"Oh. Well, in that case." Betty ruffles back that hair, and then her hands flicker, long and loose as white petunias, as she portions out the cards. There must have been a time when I enjoyed bridge, just as it stands to reason that I did not always drug myself to sleep. Perhaps it is because today is Tuesday. Evidently I can no longer relate to Tuesdays. Wednesday, Thursday, Mondays—oh, there was a time, blurring now I admit, when each day opened out like wings. I arose early and brushed my hair and made French toast for Roger and Walter. I could not keep from pressing my cheek to theirs, and gave the cat a double portion of tuna. How did I lose it? Well, now, let me count the ways . . . my turn to deal, and I watch my freshly silvered nails clatter against the red corners of the waxed cards.

"Let's have the rest of them, Sheila, how about it?"

Betty has indulged in the tiring caprice of a purple Princess phone in this room, which she has just done over in stark red and black— to match the cards? These days I make secret obeisance to all telephones. Each one I see is, theoretically at least, capable of cutting from me a binding tightness that twists in my chest, far down in the left-hand corner, and turning me loose to flash through the day. I shift, cramped chest and all, in my smart black folding chair. Today, and yesterday. And the day before. The telephone's silence has almost become visible in the air around me.

"Darling, if you're going to trump your own queen!" Three faces, as though on a single stem, turn toward me. Betty's aquamarine necklace reflects little blue points of light on her well-maintained neckline. No more is said, but it is obvious that the very least I can do is to refrain from spoiling their simple, wholesome pleasures. Next week I will not come. I will devote the time, that might by default be Walter's, to campaign headquarters. These last days I am

often there, stuffing envelopes, typing addresses, filing little cards. It has become a habit, life absent-mindedly imitating art. For I never went near the place when with incandescent face I would fling out to Roger each evening: "Don't wait up. Huge—oh such a huge mailing to get out tonight!" And now, dangling out here in space, it seems the only logical place to go.

It is possible I will never go again to the Comstock Library in the next town. The wide, well-worn concrete steps are too close together for one's usual stride, and not quite far enough apart to take two at a time. My feet must slow and rest on each rise, momentarily. In imitation of the New York library, two stiffly wrought lions guard each side. Shaped of some inferior stone, they have a cheated appearance. They are no bigger than wildcats. Actually, I have seen alley cats, bitter-eyed, loose-flanked toms, almost the size of the Comstock lions. I hurry by them without looking.

The librarian has come to know me. Her grayish lips fold tightly into themselves, and she reaches for the card index file at her side, pretending not to see I am back again. She is not fooled by my absorption in back issues of *Health and Hygiene.* They are filed near the window seat that has come to be mine. Here I can look down through the light-shedding greens of trees and lawns, and watch the throw of shadows getting blacker and longer as the night comes on. Passing cars glimmer like low white fish as the dusk fills up the street. Until nine o'clock it is still possible to recognize the car I wait for as it turns the corner. The page drops a stack of books, and the noise seems to repeat and repeat again, a discreet Roman candle in the silence that we few ranged along the sticky oaken tables cannot begin to use. Three old men, sternly cleaned and brushed, one acne-infested youth whose oily glasses hurt my eyes when he turns their gleam on me, and two teen-age girls, perfect as apples in their freshness, who are copying great quantities of words into their notebooks. It is well past nine, nine-thirty in fact, and the librarian begins to turn off the lights. I put down my article describing the dangers of the new dentrifices and, chin held level, get up from my window seat. It seems important to keep the emotion buzzing inside me in an upright position. I walk down the steps slowly and, vertical as a vase, ease myself behind the wheel of my car, accepting the fact that it has been pointless to go against the telephone's obstinacy. The road rushes along with me, and I drive faster as I near headquarters, denying I am still suspended in the library's waiting silence.

No doubt about it, my prowess with the stapler will bring victory on election day. Stacks of literature to be mailed out tower around me as I sit, reaching and clipping with my bloodless hands. I implant the silver stitch precisely in the upper right-hand corner of each pamphlet, and another volunteer snatches them to fold in threes. One bright stitch after another, one foot after another. . . . I wonder if my mouth is really crumbling at the corners. With shaking hands I light a cigarette. The candidate comes in.

It is a foregone fact, never mentioned here at headquarters, that the candidate will lose. Some patterns never change. If I had been old enough at the time I would have been a tireless worker for Adlai Stevenson. Walter and I will never make

the mistake of aligning ourselves with winners. But the candidate is charming. He stops to shake hands and chats with each smiling volunteer, and he is attentive to their answers. He seems to hear beyond the vapid words, and their faces glow and tilt toward him. Yes, the candidate is charming. He takes my hand in his, and his voice is just diffident enough. "Thankful for all the work you people are doing; it's your willingness that will win this election." I look at him again; I was not mistaken. The knowledge he will lose is back there, all right, in those delicately hooded eyes. "We've just made a fresh pot, let me get you a cup." It seems the least I can do, and as I place the thick tan cup of hot coffee in front of him, the pretty but faceless young woman who must be acknowledged vanishes, and he sees me. "You're down here quite often." I am afraid he will ask me why, for now that he has seen me, he realizes my involvement in politics has to be shallow. "I believe in the principles you stand for," I begin, but then add honestly, "I want you to win."

"In politics, and other areas," as in his pictures, his teeth crowd his smile. "There is sometimes a victory in losing." I think of Roger, his face growing smaller and grayer daily. "At least you win out over your fear of failing, if you make the try."

He is pleased with me, an intelligent young woman enlisted in his cause. "Yes, it takes courage to risk losing. But I meant more than that. Sometimes a man has to run when he knows he hasn't a ghost of a chance. There are honorable, necessary failures in politics. As in life." He has noticed the fresh makeup around my eyes, and senses a recent defeat. "Well, the main thing, it seems to me, is to have the guts to act at all." I feel I must stress this point.

"Sometimes, though, it takes more courage not to act. Things often aren't as they seem; politics are pretty complex, you know." He forgets he is leaving as he watches for my reply.

So is marriage. Roger, tiptoeing around, pretending not to notice he is being defrauded, taking no chances on making a stand. I slap the papers in between my stapler's jaws. "I'm sorry you're going to lose." And I am proud when he does not brush me back with a loyal denial. "So am I. But it's the people who will really lose, as I see it. We'll all lose."

"I for one am used to that." I know immediately that I have gone too far. Now I have really taken him beyond his professional interest in willing volunteers. He puts down his coffee cup. "And how do you manage these losses?" He is smiling but we are both serious. "I rush away from them. Dash around from one diversion to another, so I don't have to face what I've done. The more I dash, the smaller and harder I get," I add wildly. Too late I smile. "It's exhausting, but up to now it's worked." There is a stiff little silence; I am as embarrassed as he is. Luckily, his campaign manager discovers him and pulls at his elbow. "We've got to decide on these dates right now." Back under his political cover, the candidate pats my shoulder freely, and gives me the smile due to a committed constituent. I staple on as though it matters. My candidate is a man of courage, a man of honor, a man proud to fail if he must.

My fingers clench tight to the wheel as I hurry home. There could be a message. A little wind has come

up, and the climbing roses around our picture window flop like soundless black bells. There have been messages before. I see Roger and Walter inside, crammed together in the big chair, a volume of the children's encyclopedia on their laps. For a moment the cold key in my hand seems to throb forward. I put it firmly in the lock, straighten my shoulders, and go in. Walter looks up. Under the lamplight his scanty lashes point up in white stickers.

"We're reading about hummingbirds. Mommy! I saw one! It came over the hedge without its feet, and its wings were all green misty." I see that hummingbird spinning like an emerald for Walter. There is a quick, instinctive truce, while Roger and I exchange a high, proud glance. The world will know some day of Walter, our misfit, our poet. Full of his victory he hurries on. "You can put four ruby-breasted baby hummingbirds in a teaspoon!" His voice slides higher. I kiss his hair, and on the strength of that glance, touch my cheek against Roger's before I go to put my jacket away. Roger reads again.

"Listen, Walter. Now this is interesting. 'It is only because their wings move so swiftly that they can stand still in the air in front of the flowers where they search for food.'"

Walter's voice is now low with sleepiness. "Why does Mommy go out so many places?" I stop in the hall, hand on the closet door.

There is a pause. "Mommy has many places to go," Roger says at last. "She must move very fast these days, to keep it all going."

"Like the hummingbird," Walter yawns. "Hummingbirds move fast in the air and don't rest." And Walter is down as slow in Mrs. Douthit's book! There was an old movie on television the other night, some Tennessee Williams' horse opera with Marlon Brando crooning on about the little birds who rest on the air. Sorry, Marlon, old pet, but Walter is right. There is no rest on the wind.

I do not look at the telephone as I come back in, but I see Roger knows I spent this evening stapling flyers. "Bedtime, Walter. Let's put the book back; you tell me where aitch should go. Good work!" He tilts the child, who seems almost transparent in his worn white sleepers, onto his shoulder and carries him to the stairs. "So what happened around here tonight?" I do not mean to sound plaintive. Roger pauses and settles the weight of the lurching Walter, and looks away from my face. "We saw a good documentary on lions. Channel Nine." Then, as if against his will and judgment, he adds, "Nothing else. No calls." The telephone has ossified, you see, it can never ring again. I yawn elaborately and reach for the evening paper, knowing full well there will be no sleep again tonight. My mind is already stretched tight; it will flick and snap like a film running backward; I cannot stop myself from turning a frightened glance to Roger, and he flinches as if it indents his chest. His voice is rough with hidden concern. "There's some cocoa left. Heat that up and take a sleeping pill." I burn a slow red and drop my eyes to the level of his ascending ankles that are gray and scaly with some sort of nervous rash. They carry a troubled heart upward. Let Walter survive the second grade. Let her recover unharmed from her illicit flop. Stooping quickly, I pick up the empty mugs on the coffee table. As far as he is concerned, it is one and the

same. Why have I not seen it? Hopelessly entangled, as he is with the bedwetter, who also fails him daily. I go by the big window and in the reflection see the rose leaves beating their oval shadows on my face, the face of a fool who cannot distinguish between love and weakness. I feel like singing as I rinse the furry sludge from their cocoa cups, but tears slide over the rims of my eyes. Now I must work my way through a whole new dimension of shame, and on my own, and once again the silence of the Comstock Library assaults me. Roger comes downstairs, and I blot my eyes noiselessly with the backs of my hands and call out in a nearly normal voice. "You wouldn't have believed the chaos down there tonight. But I have to go. I really feel I'm making a contribution."

And he answers, "Sure, honey. You do what you have to do." In the dark kitchen my face hurts. Plunging and swooping and breaking my nails in the air; all bright, daring gestures, and flicks of contempt—I run to lean against him. If I could get that silence out of my ears, perhaps I could heal here. At least I know enough to keep the gratitude from showing in my face. "Roger. Come with me tomorrow night. It's really fascinating. We'll get Mrs. Stager to sit."

But unlike me, this courageous man accepts no handout. "I'd rather stay with Walter. He needs one of us here." I stiffen, although I realize that those of us who demand extra compassion have to take it in any form it comes, of course.

He stirs now and then, this saint, and presses his upholstered warmth nearer. Carefully I move my cold feet from his, even though I see now that he has cheated me of the grievance that kept me going, and I miss it already. There has been no traffic on our road for some time, the night has slowed to its deepest quiet. Wide awake, I yawn and honor Roger again and again for his compassion, evidently the only lasting emotion I can feel that I am getting smaller and harder, just the same. Yes, it begins to come clear to me, as the first light clears outside, that the time is approaching when I must learn to gauge wind strengths, somehow figure out how to sleep on those air currents. For how will I ever be able to get any rest here, entangled in all this pity?

A Love Poem in Time of Nuclear Crisis

• **Paul Ramsey**

The great moments stand
Whatever death has planned.

Reading the Poem, Poetry

• John Fandel

Reading poetry is not the same occupation as reading a poem. To read imagery is peculiarly different from reading an image. We do, of course, read poems when we read poetry, imagery to read an image, but our concentration is less specific and our attention tends to be leisurely. One leads to a general appreciation of a poet; the other may have us declare a single poem very fine, or just plain bad. So it is some of us will turn favorite passages of *Four Quartets* to read aloud nearly memorized lines, passages we at other times read reflectively in silence, in a state comfortably akin to reverence. But others of us will read and talk about Eliot's masterful poem in specialist fashion, concerned with the image of one Quartet for its unified imagery, fairly articulate about the form of the whole poem. We have read a poem, this poem. Our consideration of poetry is implicit; it may be clearly inferred, if not grandly implied.

Thus our implication, when we say we can read only parts of Pound, is understandable. This passage is magnificent, we say, or this one: "Listen to this." To read *The Cantos* is something else again. We do not feel equipped to undertake the job. For reading a poem, especially one of its dimension and weight, is literally a job, if a literary job. Pound's masterwork so well illustrates the point, the difference between reading a poem and reading poetry, by our hesitation in undertaking it, the whole, for the pleasure of its little parts, those classic moments of the ponderous, ponderable.

Pound and Eliot are not alone in our regard as poets we read distinct from certain poems we read by Pound and Eliot. Common readers who have read lines on lines of Wordsworth and can tell us in broad, personal terms of his love of Nature and his sublimity in simple diction may be at a loss to say a word about his metrical handling of time in "Lines," the imagery conjecturing so wise an image. In like manner, we may read the finished poems of Hopkins and be none the wiser to discourse upon the intricate structure of his poem "To Christ our Lord." Blake read cover to cover is not necessarily Blake read in "The Clod and the Pebble." We more than likely had the delights of reading poetry quite innocent of having failed in our duties of reading a poem. Reading a poem is another kind of discipline.

To read a poem is an event in pleasure. It seems to be, before the pleasure—and this is the trying point—, a discipline of expectation for pleasure. One cannot have the pleasure unless one has met the demands for that expectation, the experience the poem through imagery images. And one cannot meet the demands unless he is equipped to. He must know how to read a poem.

Luckily, in our age, he is not left helpless. "How To" books on reading poetry are not hard to find. Handbooks, regular as semesters, keep College Freshman Instructors alert to the possibility of yet another one. Poets them-

selves have assembled such texts. Not only texts: articles, essays, and those telling minutiae of the creative mind at amused ease—sentences, apercus, like the sayings of Frost, whimsical Merlin of poetic theory—have been indiscriminately published. There seems to be no excuse for not reading the poem as easily as our Victorian uncles and aunts read poetry.

They, like Victoria, read poetry—by the yard, in the more traditional footage recent poets tend to judge pedestrian, if not flatfooted. They knew poets as we know poems, Tennyson in the Queen's Drawing Room. Did they have, thereby, broader attitudes toward Browning and Laureates? Does any uncritical reader know more about poetry than one who has patiently answered questions on form, rhythm, tone, voice, among other qualities, in "Porphyry's Lover" or in that complete "fragment," "The Eagle"? Does a thorough knowledge of one poem give the critical reader a better knowledge of poetry? Is reading the poem scrupulously to understand poetry?

One poem carefully read may tell us more than we could ever guess we wanted to know about poetry, than a casual reading of many poems read for that supposed purpose. A close reading of one poem can change our ideas about poetry and, should the poem be an anthology piece, perhaps about the poem itself. "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" is such a poem. Most of us know what any schoolboy rarely lets his teacher forget: Balboa, not "stout Cortez," discovered the Pacific. We know who Chapman is, too. We even know the by now familiar story of how the poem came to be. These facts about the poem might give us an interesting illusion we understand it, on first looking into Keats's sonnet. But questions about the imagery of travel and discovery, real and imaginary, geographical and literary, or physical and vicarious, answered well, make the image the poem is somewhat different than our less attentive reading imagined. Do we care, then, who wrote it? This is one poem which, rightly read, enlightens us about poetry, for this poem is about poetry.

So is "Kubla Khan." But here again we probably know more about "a person from Porlock," Coleridge's account of his writing the poem, Kipling's curious comment on lines 14-16, than we know of the poem—though Kipling, in his comment, if extravagant, so perceptively showed he had found in one passage the test of the poetic experience, and that should be a clue for us how to read poetry in reading a poem, to know what poetry is. But still our knowledge of such trivia, like the number of grains of opium, Kipling's sentences, interrupts our experience of poetry effectively as Coleridge's interrupted imaging. Our knowledge, this kind, is "a person from Porlock," anti-poetic. And yet, a word in Porlock's person's behalf: unaware, he helps us see how inevitably the poem is about poetry. He suggests how poetry should be read.

He is like anomalous Cortez. Both interrupt the experience of reading a poem. Our attentiveness is diverted. We lose intention. We think about things extraneous to the thing, the poem. Only in one way can "a person from Porlock" or "stout Cortez" help us see what the reading of a poem shows about poetry: only when we see neither matters; only as we see the poetic experience transcends them. It is good when we see that for poetry, neither, however he interrupts, can ultimately spoil the poem.

But we can see this only when we understand that a poem is an image for something other than its images, or when we read poetry as we read a poem well. Images, imagery, are for an image; poetry is through and by a poem. The image, the poem, may be about imagery, about poetry, but even then the image, the poem, is not standing for a neat definition: Poetry is . . A poem is . . . Even then the poem is poetry, the image it images as we understand how to read the significant life significantly expressed.

Significant life? It does sound like one of those phrases, apparently meaningful, actually too imprecise to mean much, if felicitous. What life is not significant? Whose life is insignificant? What is significant? What does *significant* mean? What is life? How can life, being life, be significant? We all have our questions and our answers. It is right we should. But who thinks his walled garden is the only model of paradise? Is not all this precisely the point? Is not significant life what the poet images for us to see beyond himself, his poem, his images, his signifying?

And significant expression? One man's diction may be another's doodle. Language is a common inheritance, but the use of it testifies we are not all equal heirs. Decorum, we say, of our own style; decadence, of another's. Style, we have all heard, is the man. Style is also "a thinking out into language." Newman knew. The poet knows. His expression is significant because he knows himself and others, poetry is greater than diction, poetry is a poem. He must read his own poem for the significance. We all must. Making signs is to make a sign, realization beyond realizing, the meaning a poem vouches for, the expressible this particular expression signifies.

Metaphor, of course, we will say, it is a matter of metaphor, the poem's poetry, the poem itself, and, for those of us who read it in bulk, who read poetry, not poems, it is metaphor. Some of us will analyze a poem as expertly as a tree-surgeon diagnoses a nutgall; that is not necessarily reading well: "Trees" has been given chiefly a post-mortem treatment. Some of us will go on quoting "It takes a heap of living to make a house a home" incorrectly. Some of us will read into and out of the Cavaliers in too cavalier a manner. We will cavil. The poem remains. Read all the poetry we like—reading poetry is not the same occupation as reading a poem—, a poem has to be read for it.

March in Manhattan

• **Thomas Kretz**

A sclaff scurry of idle leaves
suddenly trying to climb bricks
away from a north drive of wind
into alley windows and eaves,
a birdie on the rug, he sticks
out his neck to check what was pinned
on the clothesline
before the back nine.

Scenario: The Philadelphia Art Museum

• John Wheatcroft

I

You said: "It will have to be spring
and the fountains spurting as we leave
and wind scudding spouts where they break,
like spindrift; we'll drop with the water
spilling from basin to basin."

II

What wonder that we made it—
though March, a day to shame
all April, high May at the least.

Behind, the inkblot parking lot,
just as you'd said. And steered
by your staging we crossed to
the Schuylkill, watched the blind
backward muscling of scullers,
against water, time and the wind.

III

After the transport of pictures—
holes in the walls of the world
where spun light freezes to colors—
we had to resume. The foyer,
a timepiece capping the portal,
barbed arrow hands, bars for
the hours—this too you had scripted.
"Though we still have the fountains," I whispered.

Outside, I should have let it go:
the unslaked fish mouths; the troughs
verdrigris, littered with leaves,
glass, cans, newspapers; a statue
in uniform that answered me:
"Not until the first of April."

The Consul

• Charles Edward Eaton

When the Consul got to his post, he found
The name of the country had misled him
And he wished he had been sent as a spy.
Though the rich women were festooned like birds
And the men wore spats and their monocles
Fell out like clear coins from a slot machine,
It was impossible to present his credentials.
The man who was the dictator could not
Be reached, and yet his odor streaked the city.
The police in their green uniforms splotched
The streets with a fungus of his power.
A motorcade met the Consul like a snake
As if it would play at Cinderella
With his fate, leading the black limousine,
Swerving through the plazas toward the palace
Before it turned into a wriggling worm.
Luckily it was a city by the sea
And threw hard mirror-lights into the eyes
Or, when the sun was underneath the clouds,
Presented a fat, rumpled throw of silk
Assassins wiped their bloody knives upon—
It did not encourage reimbarcation.
The Consul, in any case, was there to stay.
The baroque apartment provided by his country,
Saturated with an old commission,
Prepared to change his motives for its own.
This was the country of his dreams, there was
No question of a transfer. He had served
Around the globe only to reach this land.
If he was not received by the wizened gnome
Decked out in full regalia, he was lost.
No wonder passing the palace, he felt
Sideswiped by a knowledge too close to tears.
But night was tender with its sorrow, he slept,
Awoke, and found the sunlight ribboned him
Into the world, pulling at his carcass
Like a gaudy cart, and nothing had changed.
There was no such thing as a retirement,
He must remain in contact with the land.
The Consul had been sent there for a purpose
But it was hard to remember just what it was.

Again that day he examined his emotions
Like a chemist holding up bright liquid
In clear tubes, and the colors barred the light.
Well, then, he was a representative.
Just that. He was there for saturation.
The festival of brilliant bird-women,
The men with monocles relied upon
The stranger who had come to counsel them
Or conjure them from secret alchemies.

Memoir at Twenty-Five

• Robert Lesman

The short past:
There is little to remember with
pleasure: monologues to the mermaids,
silly-drunk on Eliot: the rainfall,
the abrupt greenery, the colorless multitudes
at bus stops, grimacing lies about arriving at love
and listening to what the wind was saying
about what I thought was important.
Which was finally nothing:
an Indiana breeze spinning elm leaves.

I spoke like a new shoe, heard only myself
in a small voice mumbling gracefully;
then nothing at all, and better.

I once imagined billboards shouting (and still
do but have learned not to admit it).

I woke one morning to discover the loss
of the real verbs, stolen like bicycles,
and there are no new ones,
only a few I've borrowed.

Whatever it is I should be doing,
I have forgotten. I will practice
by listening to the basic metals, reading
the twisted tape, feeling the great stones shift
somewhere and hallow the immense quietude
of movement vaguely forward.

SLIDES: Dunce Sent to Roam

• John Fandel

How many a dunce that has been sent to roam,
Excels a dunce that has been left at home!
Cowper

1:
In gravel lavenders
railside,
the slowing window frames
shadow of lightning
earlier trainspeed
memory
of the traveler,
the gradual moments
a universe.

2:
Long enough
looked straight down to,
the flat moving sea
steadily becomes
marble,
green rivered white,
the leaning overside
imagination
walks on.

3:
In sweeps
swift,
a cry of birds,
taut wire
twanged
at zero,
pitch again
peaks
just skimmed.

4:
Bent to hill
as waves to shore
the fixed figure
of wind,
three trees,
budding, leafed, bare:
waiting
wrested
wise.

5:
An opening in the wood:
greensward to a lake:
one white water lily;
one swan beyond the lily;
beyond the swan, one bather
bare on a lakelevel stone;
one cloud beyond the bather
bare white as a bather,
a swan, a water lily.

6:
Called by a stream
to look at it
falling into a valley,
meant to see
five streams,
each a sound different;
quintessential
in distance,
one to the sea.

7:
The nearest mountain
is the positive
of two . . . three . . . four
similar
arranged negatives
of the present
development
in a solution
of mist.

Two Poems

• David Conford

Church-musick

The whirr of the arrow hellbent
For the martyr, the slippery sound
Of a border guard's spear
In some who me? saint's fat neck
Are counterpoint to the mumble
Of the bishop's *in secreto.*
That oil merchant from Cracow
With his lucky missal
Was pinned to a wall
By a myopic paranoid
From the baron's entourage
Who worried too much
About his wife's lost virtue.
Thus do we celebrate
Annoyed private citizens
With itchy trigger fingers.
The planted arrows sprout
Homilies, the pious exempla
Grow through the innocent lye;
The end of a Saracen's sword
Has a telling point
And his scimitar is a caution.

The Poet as a Wood Carving

Severity of sky forces the earth
To hatch a nest of stones, a rocky birth
Of sand sparkling like smashed bottles: the lines
At noon separate here into two pines
And five red boulders, three birds with long tails
And me, on a cross, grinning, supported by nails.
In this country a Christ would split his sides
In laughter like a fool's. The Spanish tides
Of the air, austere and hot, pound out the saints
Like mallets belting a ton of clay. Paints
Of hills and crooked trees color these cheap,
These phony martyrs and their eyes seem deep
To the gaping tourist. He buys thirty-three
And a jesting Jesus deifies me.

The Sincerity of Coby Sedgwick

• Thomas A. West

There's always one that screws it up every time. I know, see, because I've been a sergeant for twenty-five years, most of them spent training these guys that come from everywhere or nowhere at all. I train them with everything I have, but all my experience didn't matter a piss hole in a snowbank when it came to Coby Sedgwick. He came from Harvard. A real brain, I thought before he arrived on post. I mean he graduated from Harvard, and I got to admit that impresses me very much.

When the bus farted in from Devens I was there to meet it, as usual to begin another sixteen-week basic training cycle. They fell out and lined up in pretty good order—all but one idiot who was still sleeping. The driver was laughing so hard he was about to bust.

"Where the hell is Sedgwick?" I asked him.

"Oh . . . Lord . . . are you gonna have fun . . . with this one!" As I recollect, tears were streaming down his face.

Sedgwick wasn't even pretty. Back in the fifties, college kids were mostly clean with short haircuts. Anyhow, Coby's eyebrows were missing (he didn't shave them; they just never grew, is all); his nose was bent, and the eyes were little black spots that turned in—not all the time, but there was this cast, and they'd sail up the whites and almost go out of sight, like he was drunk. He was bald, too; twenty years old and he's hairless. I asked him once, I said Sedgwick, how come you haven't got any hair? He said he was scared by a marble doorknob when he was two years old. I gave him an equal number of days of KP for that—if there's one thing I can't stomach it's a wise guy. But then, you know, something about Sedgwick I couldn't put my finger on. He wasn't *really* a wiseacre. He'd come out with a dumb comment like that about his hair, and then he wouldn't laugh or wink at some buddy (he didn't have any anyways); instead, he'd swear it was true. His eyes would tilt—they'd swim back like water bugs and his little mouth would open in an "O"—and he'd say, "Hodetht, Thaghagedt, hodeth, it'th a facdt." Plus a lisp, he talked like he had jelly beans in his nose. Coby called his trouble a "deviated theptic, like in tank," and when I asked him for more info, he said his father frightened the nasals out of him when he was in kindergarten. After that cute remark I took him aside. I figured he'd level with me if we was alone; guys like to show off, you know?

"Okay, Coby—what makes you say things like that?"

"Like whadt, Thahgedt?"

"Like you have no hair because you were scared by ivory doorknobs, and like you talk funny on account of your father scared the nasals out of you when you was in kindergarten."

"Budt it'th *true,* hodetht it ith."

He was so damned sincere. That's what I been trying to say all along: he wasn't a wise guy because of his sincere-ness. But I had to discipline him, just on principle. I wanted to treat him like I did every other kid.

Once when he was on guard duty I asked him his General Orders (all twelve of them, like "I will never leave my post—" that sort of thing); and, well, it's trouble if you don't know each one down to the last word. So, the lieutenant and me, we were doing the rounds when we came to Coby.

"What are your General Orders, soldier?" the lieutenant snapped.

Coby started reciting the Ten Commandments.

"Thou thalt have no odher godth before me . . ."

Thatth ath far ath he got. Except for five days on KP, after which he came up and apologized to me so hard I figured he was either going to cry, or have one of those St. Vital fits. I told him to forget it, and walked away from him.

One Sunday I saw him with a book, off under a tree.

"Coby?"

He started to get up, saying, "Yeth, Tharg?"

"As you were, Sedgwick, as you were. Cigaret?"

"Oh, no, thankth."

"What are you reading?"

"*War and Peath.*"

"Must be an old Army book, right, Coby? Men go to war and grab a pieth whenever they can. Right?"

"Pleath don't go imitating me, Tharg."

"Okay, sorry. Wow, that book sure is a thick one."

"Thath all right," he says to me, "tho am I."

I looked at him hard. I remember thinking, if he graduated from Harvard, read the fattest books in the world, and comes up with the quick remark so damned easy—why in hell couldn't he clean a rifle or stand at attention? He just sat there, as he was, grinning up at me.

"Who you trying to kid, Coby?"

The hurt look came over his face.

"You don't fool me a bit." I swallowed and went on, as he got to the edge of being real scared. I mean he was really putrified. "If you can get a degree from the country's best—"

Suddenly, he looked relieved. "*You* could, Tharg,—hodetht. I know guyth denther than lead who—"

"You wouldn't be comparing me with them, would you?" I could hardly see through my eyelids. I got to admit he squirmed like an eel on a hook, and I enjoyed it.

"No . . . *no*, Tharg—"

And we both said "hodetht" at the same time.

Whenever Mail Call came, Coby would hang around outside the mob, waiting as if he might get at least a magazine, or some third-class advertisements. Only once I know of, he got a letter. I was curious, so I strolled over and asked him if he'd finally heard from his girl friend. I wasn't at all serious, you know; I mean who in hell would go out with a freak like Coby? But I hit the jackpot. Out of the envelope fell a dozen photos of one of the sexiest broads I ever seen outside the movies. The teats looked like they were blown up by a bicycle pump, and those hips, I bet they could grind corn off a cob.

Anyhow, we gathered around him, some of the guys hooting like crazy and passing these snapshots around. Coby was madder than a Chinaman,

and he had a tantrum, spitting and shrieking, rolling on the ground like a two-year-old kid with the bends, until we gave him his pictures back and went away.

I sent him to the doc with a note about what happened, and I told the C.O., but Doc Stegner mailed him right back without a word except "malingerer," and Captain Butterwork just laughed like I'd told him there was a elephant in the shower.

So the weeks went by, and pretty soon I began getting complaints from other recruits, and especially the non-coms in Coby's platoon. They were mad as hell over what would happen every time there was an inspection. Captain Butterworth was a pretty rough cookie, a real chicken; I mean he would wear these white gloves, and by hell he'd find dirt if he had to go up your nose for it. Well, sure enough, Sedgwick was always screwing things up. His bed would be made, but the ridges and rumples would make the Andes look like pimples. His goddam rifle—well, it was like he'd puked down the barrel instead of scrubbed it. Lord, I'd holler at him during a full-field: "Don't you *ever* clean this piece?"

Of courth he did, my ath he did.

When the C.O. whistled through, he zeroed in on Coby every mother-loving time, and weekend passes would float away like mirages on the desert.

So I made it this personal campaign of mine to help the guy. I cleaned his rifle, I made his bed, I showed him by-the-numbers how to lay everything out on his bunk—just so, all his equipment that had to be bright and shining, the bayonet polished, combat boots sparkling chestnut brown—hell, I don't mean to get carried away. But if they ever show me a creep like Sedgwick again, I *will* get carried away, to the nearest funny farm. They can have my stripes, my pension—the works.

But he wasn't really that bad, like I've said. It was just at these times. These certain times.

Like out at Range Sixteen. That's where we put the guys through their M-1 firing, at three hundred yards. So one day we marched them out and put them through the paces. It's quite a sight, one hundred soldiers, on line, firing on command, with another hundred beside them, feeding them ammo and teaching—well, I get emotional, see, because I'm a proud son-of-a-bitching infantryman. Anyways, the range is a huge place. Sand all over, with weeds sprouting here and there, but it's a good feeling to lie down and shoot, as far as I'm concerned. What happens, the captain is in a high tower about fifty yards in back of the firing line. He has a bitch-box so he can order the rest of us—like the lieutenants and non-coms in charge of certain sectors. The captain explains the series of commands very careful, because we got a lot of dumb bastards that come along the pike; ready on the right, he says; ready on the left; ready on the firing line; the flag is up (there's a white flag downrange, raised from the pits where there's another company crouched down, pulling the targets up on pulleys); the flag is waving (you see the flag going back and forth); then he says, "Targets, UP!"—and all one hundred targets spring out of the earth, and the men start firing as quick as they can. Well, of course you're not supposed to shoot until the C.O. says "UP!" Lord, every man there knows that. What'd be the point? There wouldn't be any-

thing to shoot at. Besides, firing on a range without an order is like calling your mother a—so help me, I can't say it.

It was a bright, clear day and we all felt good. Things went real smooth right up to the commands. The captain's voice boomed out over the Bitch:

"READY ON THE LEFT, LIEUTENANT CLYDE?"

(Yes, sir.)

"READY ON THE RIGHT, LIEUTENANT MOON?"

(Yes, sir.)

"READY ON THE FIRING LINE."

There was this quiet pause until the flag went up.

"THE FLAG IS UP."

"THE FLAG IS WAVING."

"TARRRGETSS—"

A shot rang out. Pure, bright, sharp, and clear like the weather: one round, ball ammunition, on the way, splash, and we all heard it whining through the woods like it was sorry. "He must've shot at some goddam crow," I remember saying under my breath. If I was Catholic, I would've crossed myself.

The silence scared me a little. Even me. I expected the tower to explode and I thought the captain would be quivering all over with red rage. The silence made it worse. It was heavy—it made everybody as still as the dead on a battlefield. Then the captain spoke in a low, serious voice like he was a principal right on the livid edge with his students.

"Who fired that shot?" was all he asked.

The wind was the only sound.

"Sergeant, get that man's name and serial number; *we know his rank.*"

I knew where to go. By the time I got to him, Sedgwick was wildly fanning the air and he had this big shit-eating grin on his face, and then he picked up the ejected cartridge, see, and he was putting the goddam thing back into his belt.

I looked down at him. "Coby," I said. "Dear Coby, what in hell are you doing now?" I knew the reaction like I knew what the rest of the day was going to be like.

His grin went fast enough, and the eyes melted, and the little "O" of a hurt mouth came, and then he told me all he was doing was policing the brass, a term we use for picking up empty shells. Only Coby said he was polithing the brath.

I don't know how many days he got for that. Both KP and guard. Poor kid. I began to feel sorry for him—when that black Sunday of that black week rolled along. We had an I.G. inspection—the worst kind. I guess him being half civvie, we all fear an Inspector General like turkeys fear November. Well, when he arrived, you could tell his wife or boss had got to him, because I ain't never in my life seen such stiff saluting. Regimental, battalion, and company officers hovered by him, looking over his shoulder at his clipboard, and hoping to the Almighty that nothing went wrong.

Now I had *personally* checked Coby, doing everything for him with the help of some other jokers in the squad—while Coby waited outside. When it was set, I allowed him to get back in and stand at attention by his bunk—but that was ridiculous. Coby stood at attention like he was getting ready to take a crap.

When the I.G. came, he looked like he could rip a phone book in half with his eyes. He thrashed his way into the first three platoons, and when he'd left, the troops were gawk-

ing after him like they had battle fatigue. He'd stop and ask a soldier a question so fast the kid would have to double-take and wince like he'd been pistol-whipped. I've never heard so much stammering since after my outfit at Salerno was hit by eighty-eights for weeks.

But even the I.G. was out of words when he reached Coby. He turned to Captain Butterworth, with a look as if he was holding up a dead rat by its tail, and he said, "What's *this?*"

I saw the captain's legs shake.

"That's Private E-1 Sedgwick, sir," I interrupted, seeing that the captain had lost out somewhere along the line.

The I.G turned back and stared at Sedgwick, who looked at the I.G. and smiled. He *smiled!* I mean. Hell, you just can't *do* that sort of thing. It's like purposely farting in church. When at attention, you look straight ahead, three hundred yards at *nothing.*

I expected Sedgwick to say, "Hello, General, old sport, it sure is a nice day." It wouldn't have surprised me in the least.

Shaking his head slowly from side to side, the I.G. surveyed the area. He saw Coby's belt, tarnished and loose. He saw one of Coby's fatigue legs bloused, the other one hanging out. He saw one combat boot lacing untied, spread out around his shoe like a squashed snake. He saw stubble on Coby's chin. He saw a button undone in Coby's fly.

Now I swear by all that's holy, Coby was shaved, he was clean and neat—I swear he was. I'm still telling the captain that. But when I do, I feel like Coby, when he says to me, "Hodetht, tharg." And to top it off, the little bastard had messed his area up —how, I'll never know, except I sometimes think he used his mind to move things; he just concentrated, and lo and behold, sir: one screwed-up mess, compliments of Coby Sedgwick, yeah.

Under the bunk, just visible to the I.G., was a coat hanger.

"What's that coat hanger doing there, soldier?" the I.G. snapped at him.

Coby turned and looked.

"I dondt thee it doig anythig, thir."

The I.G. turned red as a map of Asia, and he stomped out of there so fast I couldn't have got his license if I'd tried, and like a fan with confetti, he swept all the little pieces of colonel and major and captain and lieutenant right after him. Sergeants, too, excepting me. I was still fixed to the floor.

I gave him fifteen days, and the captain gave me five when he got his voice back. The whole company was screwed out of another weekend pass.

Finally, the C.O. and the rest of us got together and we convinced the doc to hand Coby what we used to call in the old days a Section Eight —a nice way of saying the guy was mental. Coby was discharged, and the rest of the Basic Training Cycle sailed along smooth, real smooth.

Years went by. After Korea I was on leave seeing a friend in Boston— and I saw Coby, standing out in front of one of those fancy theater joints, and he had that absolute queen hanging on one of his arms: blonde, she was, and had a walk that looked like it could grind corn off a cob.

He looked so different I almost passed him by: all slicked up, he was, in the smartest gray tweed civvies you ever saw, and he had a

rounded squat hat covering up his cueball. But the difference wasn't in his clothes, no sir, but his posture. He stood straighter than a Coldstream Guard and his eyes were steady as a marksman's on target.

"Mr. Sedgwick, I presume?" I said.

"Yes?" Well, I might as well of been a legionnaire from Venus. And when I told him I was his old sergeant he had during basic, he *still* pulled a blank.

"Coby?" I said sort of weak-like; I wasn't too sure of myself now, but me—I never forget a face, especially Coby's.

"Ah, Sergeant," he answers me in this Rawther British voice. "You must mean my twin brother, Coby," he says. "I am certainly happy meeting you. Coby has spoken of you most highly. This is Geraldine . . ."

And so on. He chatted real nice, while Geraldine twitched her profile around so the crowd could drool.

Well, the business got to me all the way back to base, and even today I worry about how that guy took us. Malingerer my ass, he was a genius. What really got me was his sincere-ness. I could've investigated, but I'd be crazy if I did and Coby had to take basic with *me* all over again! Lord, what a thought!

The Aging Poet Writes of the Continuing Evidence of His Cunning in Breaking the Horns of Unicorns

• Sister Maura, S.S.N.D.

Like Dionysus, bragging to Hades,

he swaggers through the poem

of conquest. Words smell

goatskin fever. Lines paunch

like a sagging belly.

The wine of love slops

in a soup tureen.

Snowflakes in His Wake

• Gary D. Younglove

Hard driven snow, like icy sand, pelted against Chris's reddened cheeks. Although he had pulled the hood of his parka well forward and tied it tightly under his chin, his ears had long since gone numb and his feet, bound in ski boots and lashed tightly to his skis, were cramped. For two hours he had strained his eyes in vain attempts to locate some recognizable landmark. This effort, coupled with constant attention to make certain Margo was following close behind him, had caused his eyes to become red with weariness. He knew they must be going the right way, for there was only one side of Hook Mountain that could be descended on skis. The other side was a jagged, cliff-strewn incline that would have prevented them from even beginning a descent. He also knew he was lost in a blinding winter blizzard, and Margo, depending on him to find the way to the cabin, was lost too.

He stopped as he had done hundreds of times since the start of the descent, but this time he didn't dig his ski poles in the white snow and push off as soon as Margo stopped beside him. He was becoming defeated by the repeated pauses in their search, pauses which only slowed progress and convinced him that they must have passed the cabin and were now somewhere below the only hope for their survival. He stared ahead, looking once more in the lingering daylight of early evening for some hope, but twenty feet away whirled a wall of snow and wind.

He removed his gloves and held them wedged in his armpit while he slipped his hands under his hood and over his deadened ears. Margo searched his face for a sign of encouragement as he stared blankly ahead.

"Do you see anything?" she shouted into the wind. Her voice was carried away by the fury of the storm and reached Chris's protected ears as a mumble.

He turned to her and cupped his hands behind his ears, indicating he hadn't heard her.

"What do you see?" she shouted.

He shrugged his shoulders and lifted his arms in an empty, hopeless gesture. His gloves fell to the ground and were almost buried in the powdery snow as he bent to retrieve them; he had to shake the snow out of them before he could put them back on his trembling hands.

"We must have missed the cabin," he said. "It can't be this far down. I'm positive it was closer than this, and besides we'd have found it by now if we were going the right way."

The strong wind whistled past them and Margo shivered convulsively. Though fear had begun to overtake her and the bitter cold had crept beneath her protective clothing, her face showed no outward sign of her condition. She shifted her weight from foot to foot and tamped her

ski poles into the snow that was rapidly covering her skis.

"Let's find some shelter so we can rest and talk without having to yell our lungs out," Margo said.

"I can't hear you," Chris answered.

"Let's find someplace to rest," she shouted.

"We can't stop. We've got to keep moving."

"But we don't know where we're going."

Chris knew this but didn't want to admit it to himself. He had fought off all the doubts that flashed before him since they had become separated from the rest of the group at the beginning of the storm. He forced himself to believe that just around the next turn or just over the next unexpected rise he would see the shape of the small log cabin. But the next turn and the next rise had come and gone behind them time and time again with nothing but whiteness. And now darkness was rapidly closing its arms about them.

Pushing against her poles, Margo moved away and downhill from Chris.

"Follow me," she cried.

Chris nearly lost sight of her as she slipped into the whirling wall of snow before he reacted to her command. But with a few strong strokes he was close behind her as she picked her way carefully down the slope. Their progress was painfully slow. The windblown snow forced them to all but walk down the inclines, and they were constantly braking and turning to avoid objects they hadn't seen. Soon a dense clump of scrubby pine trees loomed before them. Margo skied to the edge of the grove before stopping. Almost immediately Chris was beside her, holding his hands over his ears again in an unconscious effort of protection.

Margo studied the grove of trees for a moment, then bent and loosened the bindings on her skis. She stepped off the skis and held them upright and motioned for Chris to follow her. Hesitantly, he removed his skis and pushed his way through the dense growth behind her. Once in the weak shelter the trees afforded, Chris sensed a hushed tranquillity he hadn't thought possible on the windblown mountain slope. He felt peaceful and his numbed ears and fingers didn't matter anymore. He began to sit down.

"No!" Margo shouted. And her voice carried authority in the relative quiet of the grove.

He stopped in a half-seated position and looked to her for an explanation of her latest command.

"I didn't bring you in here to quit," she said. "You sit down now and you'll never get up. Don't you realize that?"

Chris stood up and leaned against one of the trees. "Then what *are* we doing here?" he said. "We aren't going to get out of this fix by standing in a grove of pines."

Margo disregarded the curtness in his reply and stood her skis upright against a tree. "We came in here to rest and to talk. We aren't accomplishing a thing roaming around this mountain like we have for two hours now." There was a note of finality in her voice.

"What do you expect to accomplish by talking in here?" he said harshly, hating himself for saying it. The terrible coldness of his surroundings and his body were beginning to take their toll on his reason.

Again she let his remark fly away with the force of the storm. "First of

all," she said. "We can hear what we're saying. We don't have to yell at each other and fight the wind."

"What is there to say?" Chris demanded. "We've searched all over this slope for the cabin. How is talk going to help?"

"We may have to spend the night out here if we don't find that cabin," Margo snapped. "Don't you think it'd be a good idea to know what we're going to do? Don't give up so easy. You aren't the only one who's cold, but you seem to be the only one who is beginning to lose your spirit."

"There's bound to be someone out looking for us. Can't we just wait till they find us?"

"Chris! The only way we can survive is to keep our thoughts and actions clear and quick. You know this as well as me. Suppose they aren't looking. Suppose they're trying to find *their* way back too. Suppose they never find us if they *are* looking. I don't know how long I can hold on but it won't be very long unless I have some cooperation from you."

Again Chris was sorry for acting as he did. He knew he must keep moving if he wanted to stay alive, but he didn't care anymore. His reason was becoming dull and abstract, and he longed only for release from his troubled and panic-stricken thoughts.

"You're a good skier, Chris," Margo said, encouraging him. "You can go on for many more hours if you have to. And if we don't find the cabin soon, you'll have no other choice unless you really want to curl up and die." Another shiver spread over her body and she began to shuffle back and forth in the snow, wrapping her arms around herself and beating them against her sides and back. "But where do we ski? We can't just go in circles. Where would that get us?"

"It would keep us alive. Alive, Chris! Open your eyes. You've been thinking death for the last hour, whether you realize it or not. You can't sit back and expect someone to just happen to come along. You know as well as I do that you'll die in a storm like this if you give up hope."

"Then you think we should ski back and forth across the side of the mountain and someone may find us that way." Chris was angry with her because she wouldn't leave him alone. Couldn't she see that he was absolutely content with things as they were now?

"No, I don't think anyone will find us. But it will be an attempt. We can beat this storm, Chris. And we may just find the cabin. We have to try. And I think we should plan to keep going until we do find our way out or, if we're lucky, until someone does find us."

Margo turned and lifted her skis from the tree. Darkness had now overtaken them, and the white snow, as it lay on the ground and floated in the eddy currents of the wind in the trees, looked like an insurmountable barrier. The relative peace in the shelter of the pines was what Chris had been searching for, and he sat on the mat of snow-covered pine needles with relief while Margo's back was to him.

"Come on. Let's keep moving," Margo said. She turned to face him and saw his bulky form on the ground. "Chris! What do I have to do to make you realize the seriousness of your condition? Get up!"

Chris looked up at her. "Why won't she just go on without me," he cried silently to himself. I need

to rest. Just a little bit. And it's so comfortable here.

Margo jabbed him in the ribs with the tip of one of her ski poles, hard enough to knock him over. The jab caused a streak of pain to race across his chest, and he gasped as he fell face down in the snow, his anger flaring up like a fire inside him.

"My God, Margo!" he sputtered. "Leave me alone. Can't you see this is the way I want it?"

"I can see only one thing. A man without courage. Without guts. A man who is afraid to fight for his life."

Chris sat up and rubbed his chest where the pain throbbed with each beat of his heart. "Go away. Go. Go!" He waved her off with his gloved hand.

Margo jabbed him again with the pole and sent him sprawling. "I'm not going to leave without you. And I'm not going to stop hitting you until you get up. You can lie there and die, but you're not going to die in comfort."

She reached out to jab him a third time but he grabbed the pole and stopped her. "All right! All right! I'll get up," he said.

Slowly he rose to his feet, enlisting the help of a tree and unconsciously the help of Margo as she held his arm.

"You first," she ordered when he had retrieved his skis.

He looked at her and hesitated until he saw the pole coming toward him. He then reluctantly made his way to the edge of the grove. The wind and snow lashed at his face and he stopped and felt Margo's ski pole in his back prodding him on. When he stepped into the full force of the storm, he thought of turning against her, but he knew she wouldn't leave him alone, so he continued to obey her commands.

"Put your skis on," she shouted.

And he bent to do as ordered. As he worked on the bindings, a sense of warmth filled his fingers and he thought of a warm fire in the cabin somewhere on the wide, long slope. He cursed himself for coming to this isolated spot to hike four hours to the top of the mountain and for not checking the weather forecast before the trek. Where are the others? he thought. Why did I have to play cat and mouse games with Margo and get separated from them when I don't know the area that well? Why do I want to be alone? The books don't say you'll . . . What's wrong with my ski? Why can't I get the cable over my heel?

"It's your front throw," Margo shouted. "Open your front throw."

Chris turned his head and looked at Margo. She had already put her skis on and was standing patiently beside him. Then he looked back at his ski and noticed the throw in the closed position and angrily opened it. In eight years of skiing this had never happened to him, and he was irked that Margo had to point it out. After tightening his bindings, he stood and buried the ends of his poles in the snow.

"I'll follow you," Margo shouted as she pointed out across the slope. "Over that way."

Chris stepped forward and began to move slowly over the deepening snow. The pace had been excruciatingly slow from the beginning of the storm, and now with darkness to contend with it was even more painful. Yet the skis slid smoothly through the dry whiteness underfoot, and many times Chris nearly lost his bal-

ance while avoiding a tree or large rock.

Occasionally he looked back and saw Margo closely behind following his lead and wondered what kind of woman she was. He had known her for little more than a month, and during that time she had never shown any signs of being adamant or forcing her opinions on him. She was a typically helpless lady when around men, but her actions since the storm had been independent and forceful. The dodging, climbing, and skiing spread new warmth through Chris's body, and he realized how irradical and helpless he had acted before her and how grateful he was that she had been the one to become lost with him. His thoughts, clearing now with the surge of warmth, tried to escape the realization that he would have to regain her respect.

Easing over a small rise that ran contrary to the mountain slope, Chris discovered himself on an extremely steep drop. His skis gained almost immediate speed, and from out of the wall of snow and darkness that always remained just out of his reach he saw a large boulder rush toward him. He swerved and purposely fell, tumbling past the rock and barely missing it. Quickly looking back, he saw Margo speeding toward the same obstacle.

"Fall down!" he shouted.

She fell, and her body rolled freely in the snow toward the rock until she struck its naked face. As the metallic clank of ski poles against granite was carried away with the wind, she lay quiet.

For one frightening moment panic gripped Chris as he saw her crumpled figure in the snow, but as he worked his way back up the slope, he saw her moving. When he reached her, she had loosened her bindings and was sitting up.

She looked at him, her face showing the pain she felt. "I think I've hurt my leg."

"Can you stand on it?"

"I don't know."

She tried to get up, and Chris put her arm over his shoulder to help her. She stood several moments on her good foot before testing the other, and when she did she gasped slightly as fingers of hot pain rushed up her leg.

"You aren't going to be able to use it," Chris said. "Sit back down."

"Let me try again."

"No. You'll only hurt it more."

"But we've got to keep moving."

"Sit down!" Chris shouted. "I'll think of something. Just give me a minute. We aren't going to stay here."

"But can I believe you?"

"I'm all right now. Don't worry. I'll get us out. I've got to."

Margo sat down and leaned against the face of the rock, and as she did she felt the heat in her body slowly begin to ebb. She watched as Chris removed his skis and leaned on an outstretched arm against the rock above her. He was breathing heavily and he stood there for some time regaining his wind. The storm had not decreased in intensity since its beginning, and the temperature had dropped steadily so that each breath of fresh air was like an icy flood rushing into their lungs to carry away their life each time they expelled it.

Chris finally took a last deep breath, exhaled heavily, and stepped away from the rock. He reached down for their snow-covered skis and placed them side by side in the snow. He rummaged through the jum-

bled snow in search of Margo's poles and, once located, placed them along with his across the positioned skis.

"What are you going to do?" Margo shouted.

"Make a sled," he answered casually.

"Chris! Let me try my leg again. I can't see forcing you to tow me on a makeshift sled."

"Your leg is probably broken. Every step you take on it will only make it worse. Just sit still and let me make the decisions from now on."

Chris took the safety straps from each ski and tied them around the front pole and each ski to form a crude but usable bind. The four straps were hardly enough to tie the one pole to the ski, so he removed the outer laces from Margo's boots and tied the two outside skis to a pole near the rear. He picked up the remaining poles and leaned them against the rock.

"This will have to do," he said. "It will be a rough ride but it will be a way out."

Margo made an effort to move.

"Wait," Chris ordered. "I've got a little more to do."

He walked out of sight into the wall of darkness and snow and returned shortly with an armload of pineboughs which he positioned in a crude mat on the skis. Then he disappeared in the darkness again. He was gone much longer this time, but he finally returned holding a long, straight stick with a hook, formed by a branch, on its end and three other short sticks. He leaned the long stick against the rock with the poles and placed the shorter sticks on the ground beside her.

"I was beginning to fear you were lost," she said.

"I had a hard time finding the right sticks," he said. "Does it hurt much?"

She shook her head. "Only when I move it. It's too cold to feel anything."

Taking the outer laces from his boots and the string from his parka hood, he fashioned a splint on her leg, binding it tightly in place for the journey he knew lay ahead. Then he helped her onto her back on the rugged sled.

"Is there any way I can help?" Margo asked.

"Yes," Chris shouted as he moved toward the rock. "It will be hard and may seem useless but it will help keep you warm. Take these poles and try to push the sled with them as I pull. Okay?"

"Yes."

"Then we're on our way."

Chris worked the hooked part of the stick under the mat of boughs and over the ski pole at the front of the makeshift sled. Taking a tight grip on the sticks, he began pulling Margo and the sled behind him. His thoughts were now centered on survival, and his burden made him more aware of the importance to find help soon. He could not afford to falter or allow defeat to rule his judgment, for Margo's life depended on his struggle, both physically and emotionally.

The progress was difficult. Snow, now almost knee deep, forced Chris to lift his feet high and stretch his steps as far as possible in order to move forward with any speed. Margo's efforts with the ski poles went unnoticed, and with each painful step Chris fought off the deadening oppression of exhaustion and hopelessness. He didn't know where he was going, but it didn't matter. He was

moving and he was staying alive. The weight of the sled was making him exert himself, and he found he was becoming warm and uncomfortable. The realization surprised him, and he thought of Margo and her inability to do the same.

Stopping, he turned to Margo. "Are you keeping warm?"

She didn't speak but nodded her head weakly. Chris, knowing it might be fatal for him, removed his parka and wrapped it around her, ignoring her weak protests. The bitter wind cut through him and he quickly returned to his task, knowing also that he would have to move that much faster and work that much harder to keep warm.

Endlessly he moved onward around trees and rocks, through snow drifts, and into the wall of darkness and wind. The sled wedged on unseen objects buried in the snow and wrenched the stick from his hand. He strained to pull his burden up each little rise and fought to hold it back as he worked his way down the many steep dips, while his steps counted out the minutes and the minutes were forgotten like the millions of tiny snowflakes that tumbled around the miniature mountains of his wake.

He fell many times as he plunged ahead, each time rising with just a little less enthusiasm and a little less determination. The long hours of cold and searching were taking a toll on his strength that his willingness was unable to replace or substitute. But he was driven with a fanatic desire to reach the safety he forced himself to believe lay just ahead. Again and again he rose to fall once more, and each time he rose and fell, he felt the inadequacy of his body against the storm and the uselessness of his failing determination when his muscles cried out for him to stop. His only hope was that he might find shelter for Margo; thoughts for his own welfare had left him many steps behind.

Chris began to function like a machine, yet with each fall, the pace he had set for himself faltered until he was pressing forward with a palsied gait. He criss-crossed the wind-blown slope, hoping his organized efforts would bring him upon the cabin or some structure which would afford shelter. When he felt he could go no further, he forced himself over the next rise and down the succeeding slope. He tortured his body to do what his mind commanded and it reluctantly obeyed. In what seemed a final effort, he lurched against the resistance of the weight of Margo and the sled, and his knees gave away. He struggled to his feet and took another step only to fall again into the snow. His heart cried to his aching legs to move and his soul prayed for strength, but his body rebelled against the torture. He strained against his burden and collapsed in the cold, soft blanket of snow, pounding his fists on the ground amid cries of anguish.

Margo rolled off the sled and inched her way painfully to his side.

"Here. You'd better put this on," she said weakly, handing him his parka.

"No. No," he cried. "I can go on. I will go on."

"Chris, you've done the best you can. I can't ask any more than that."

"I've got to get you some help. I can't stop now. Keep moving. I've got to keep moving."

Margo put her arm around Chris's

neck and drew him to her. "It's all right, Chris. It's all right. We can try to last out the night here. We can keep each other awake and—"

"It won't work, Margo. We're half gone now."

"Please listen to me, Chris. You'll kill yourself if you keep this pace up."

"Do you want me to quit here and die slowly?"

Margo didn't get a chance to answer, for a muffled crack, like the shot of a rifle, rang out somewhere in the storm. Chris pushed her away and sat up, straining his ears to hear another shot. Hope exploded in his heart as he sat still and silent.

"Oh, God," he mumbled. "Let it be someone. Let him shoot again."

And for ten minutes, each minute like an hour, he sat tensed and frozen in the wind while snow whipped past him into the darkness. Then, as before, he heard the same dull crack and knew someone was ahead, firing a rifle into the storm in what seemed a vain effort to kill it.

"Get on the sled," he shouted at Margo, forgetting her condition.

She began crawling back and he moved to help her. With new-found strength he plodded on, falling as before but getting up each time with the remembrance of the shot still ringing in his ears. Again the shot cracked out in the bitter cold, and a warm prayer of thankfulness filled his soul. He quickened his pace though his legs screamed their disapproval, and he waited to hear the next shot which would steer him closer to safety. It was so long before he heard it that he was beginning to fear he never would, but it rang clearer this time and he knew he was almost there. His heart pounded in his chest as he made his jerky way forward, and he dreamed of a cabin with a warm fire and friends and safety for Margo and himself.

As he plunged into the darkness, he saw it. Like a sentinel with open arms, the cabin, the goal of his struggle, rose from the storm and beckoned them to it. Forcing his wobbling legs into a stilted run, he converged on the cabin and fell into a grateful unconsciousness near the figure of a man with a rifle in his arms.

Margo turned and saw this same figure open the door of the cabin and she heard him call inside: "They're here. They made it. I need some help."

And she cried. Her tears fell in the snow and were crushed beneath her as she rolled off the sled and crawled up beside Chris and held him in her arms.

On Suffering

• **Paul Ramsey**

Formless the tears that come first, unsufficed.
The tears that answer, formal, are of Christ.

Contributors

ROBERT JOE STOUT has been a frequent contributor to **four quarters** during the past decade; he lives in Austin, Texas. PATRICIA S. STATEN took a degree in English at the University of Colorado; she has had her fiction published in *Descant* and some poems in *Cycloflame*. JOSEPH BEATTY has degrees from La Salle College, The Johns Hopkins University, and Haverford College, and is studying for the doctorate and teaching at Northwestern. LAUREL TRIVELPIECE "took her bachelor's degree at the University of California, Berkeley, and has had poems in *Prospero's Cell, Ante,* and *Works;* this is her first published story." PAUL RAMSEY had two poems in the March issue of this magazine. JOHN FANDEL, college professor and Poetry Editor of *Commonweal,* had a companion piece, "Teaching the Poem, Poetry," in a previous issue of **four quarters.** THOMAS KRETZ, a member of the Society of Jesus, is on the staff of a college in Osorno, Chile. JOHN WHEATCROFT is professor of English at Bucknell University and associate editor of the *Bucknell Review;* his latest collection of poems is *Prodigal Son.* CHARLES EDWARD EATON has frequently appeared in this magazine; his most recent volume of poetry is *On the Edge of the Knife,* published in late 1968. ROBERT LESMAN had a poem, "The Continuum," in the March issue. DAVID CONFORD writes (tongue in cheek?) that he "was born in Pocatello, Idaho, to a band of half-Negro gypsies; spent childhood picking pears in Oregon for 'Fruit-of-the-Month Club.' Packed by accident in October selection and shipped to San Diego, where he worked as beach bum for a year. Graduated with honors from Shugaloup College (Cut and Patch, Texas) and received Ph.D. from Cambridge. Has slung hash, worked as lumber jack in Moosejaw, Maine, repaired lobster pots and painted barns in Cape Cod, and picked tobacco in North Carolina . . . has never befriended Norman Mailer." THOMAS A. WEST is "getting together a collection of stories for possible publication," among which is his story about Coby Sedgwick. SISTER MAURA, S.S.N.D., chairman of English, College of Notre Dame, Maryland, had her third selection of poetry, *Bell Sound and Vintage,* published in 1966. GARY D. YOUNGLOVE, a captain in the personnel sector of the Air Force, is stationed at Wright-Patterson Base near Dayton, Ohio.

Editor, EDWARD P. SHEEKEY, F.S.C.
Associate Editors, JOHN J. KEENAN, F. PATRICK ELLIS, F.S.C.
Business Manager, CHARLES V. KELLY
Circulation Manager, RICHARD P. BOUDREAU
Typographic Cover Design by JOSEPH MINTZER

Manuscripts and other correspondence should be addressed to the Editor, **four quarters,** La Salle College, Philadelphia, Penna. 19141. Manuscripts should be typed double-spaced and should be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Annual Subscription: Two Dollars.